

### Sociology - Latvia

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Tabuns, A. (2002). Sociology - Latvia. In M. Kaase, V. Sparschuh, & A. Wenninger (Eds.), *Three social science disciplines in Central and Eastern Europe: handbook on economics, political science and sociology (1989-2001)* (pp. 452-466). Berlin: Informationszentrum Sozialwissenschaften. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-281203>

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*Aivars Tabuns*

## **Sociology – Latvia**

*Discussant: Sylviya Senkane*

### **1. Analysis of the pre-1989 situation**

#### **The spectrum of Marxism-Leninism**

The Stalinist era was a period of isolation from the scientific world, as well as from the Soviet Union's own scientific heritage. Since 1940, the blackout on statistical reporting worsened consistently. Demographic data publication ended; no statistical yearbook was published again until 1956 – after a pause of more than 20 years. There was no empirical research or fieldwork, because the Communist Party was loath to permit anything that might disclose errors in its doctrine.

Between 1956 and 1965, many attacks were launched against sociology as a conceptual science. Sociology was not set apart from political science, i.e., it was interpreted a bit more broadly than was the case later, when theoretical problems in the area of politics were always classified under “scientific communism”, not sociology. Sociology was portrayed as an ideological weapon of American imperialism.

The situation changed somewhat after Stalin's death in 1953. As the Soviet Union's foreign policy began to change, contacts between Soviet and foreign scientists resumed, and Soviet specialists began to attend international conferences.

In August 1967, a plenary session of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) was devoted to a discussion of “steps to be taken toward the further development of social sciences and in the interest of increasing the role of these sciences in the building of communism”. Leaders of Soviet science believed that sociology could improve the existing regime. Around this time, the view began to dominate that sociology was a discipline dealing with “concrete social reality”.

In 1966, a Department of Applied Sociology was opened at Latvian State University (*Latvijas valsts universitāte*), and the training of professional sociologists finally began. On July 1, 1966, a laboratory of sociology was established at Latvian state radio (which had conducted irregular research since 1963). The first generation of Latvian sociologists had no formal education or training in the discipline and was recruited from various professions, mostly historians. The development of sociology in Latvia was hindered both by the interruption in professional succession (most of the notable representatives of the social sciences either emigrated from Latvia during the war or were repressed later) and by the lack of intellectual contacts.

As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, sociology in Latvia developed thanks to the fact that it was seen as an element of social engineering – a set of empirical processes to obtain information that in turn would allow the diagnosis and manipulation of society. In fact, this view was symptomatic of a crisis, because by granting this role to sociology, the authorities were admitting that society had freed itself from ideological paralysis, that society was alienated to a degree from the “mind and conscience of our time” (which is how the CPSU liked to describe itself), and that the party by no means automatically represented society. Theoretical sociology nevertheless developed very slowly.

Most Latvian sociologists researched the professional aspects of education, cultural issues, and the relationship of production to a specific branch of the economy or even a specific company. Thanks to the specifics of research methodology, sociology was largely influenced by the true problems of society, not by orthodox ideology. Financial resources also limited the selection of

topics. Researchers usually chose as interview subjects students, schoolchildren, or groups of workers who filled out questionnaires at their place of employment. Research techniques like individual interviews and meetings in people's homes were used much less often. Regular surveys based on a national random sampling of the entire population did not begin until the early 1990s.

One of the first research projects to gain attention in society and that illustrated sociology's abilities was a book by Talivaldis Vilcins published by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR in 1968. The book fully corresponded to the demands of the culture of the profession. A few years later, in 1970, Rita Kvelde defended the first sociological dissertation, "Radio broadcasts and the development of public opinion". The dissertation was based on a fairly large amount of empirical material (more than 6,000 respondents were questioned).

The 1970s were a golden age for empirical sociology. Throughout the 1970s, Latvian sociologists participated in their first major international research project, "The Influence of Higher Education and the Reproduction and Development of the Social Structure of Socialist Societies". This project involved researchers not only from the Baltic states and the central regions of European Russia, but also colleagues from Bulgaria, East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. In the early 1980s, Latvian sociologists took part in a project that covered several Soviet cities and was titled "The Social Structure of the Urban Population in the USSR".

Between 1970 and 1981, a great deal of low-budget research was done in Latvia. The work of Latvian social scientists (projects that could be classified as more or less sociological in nature, as well as those using the results of sociological research) was published in many books, brochures, and magazine articles. Maija Asmane, Daina Fismeistare, and Talivaldis Vilcins published the first booklet in the Latvian language on the methods and organization of sociological surveys in 1977. In 1975, a Baltic branch of the Soviet Sociological Association was established to coordinate sociological research in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. At the beginning, fewer than 100 individuals and 30 institutions were engaged in sociological research. By the mid-1980s, this had increased to 300 individuals and 60 institutions. In 1978, there were 103 individual and 18 institutional members in the Latvian division of the sociological association, while in 1983 the numbers had increased to 112 and 23, respectively. The Baltic Sociological Association held conferences every other year.

The 1980s were a time of countless surveys, many of them on a high professional level. The largest research projects were carried out at three institutions: the Latvian Academy of Sciences (Latvijas Zinatnu akademija), Latvian State University, and the Riga Polytechnic Institute (Rigas Politehniskais instituts). There were also sociological centers in

several of the country's largest factories. The work of these various organizations was not coordinated. The leaders of institutions or sociological groups dictated the topics, and the research projects included a fairly high proportion of commercial projects (most often commissioned by administrative institutions or enterprises). It was in this period that the first academically educated sociologists entered the field, having undergone the same type of educational program at Latvian State University as did people who studied philosophy.

### **Pre-war traditions**

The social sciences in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s were characterized by many accents and the names of many new thinkers (Tabuns, 1997, 1998). Latvian social researchers began to attend sociology meetings in the West; for example, Karlis Kundzins attended the Frankfurt Sociology Congress in 1932. The works of prominent sociologists, among them Pitirim Sorokin's "The Sociology of Revolution" (1929), were translated, and the first empirical research projects were done (e.g. Olgerts Pinkis in 1938). The significance of translated works cannot be overemphasized. Sorokin's book, for example, gave the Latvian public a glimpse of the ideas of such thinkers as Herbert Spencer, Sigmund Freud, Vilfredo Pareto, Gabriel Tarde, Werner Sombart, Max Weber, William McDougall, and others.

The first Latvian-language sociology textbook – Peteris Birkerts' *Zociologija* – was published in 1921. The literature cited and mentioned in this work shows the three major schools of thought that influenced Birkerts' ideas. First and foremost, one finds the influence of psychologists and the Chicago school. The citations also suggest that authors with social-democratic orientations heavily influenced Birkerts. The third set of influences came from Russian thinkers. The work also cites many Latvian thinkers. The long list of authors indicates that Latvian society had an opportunity to learn about the views of the most famous social thinkers of that era. Second, one can clearly see the dominance of adherents of the psychological school, most of whom did not toe the Durkheim line in sociology.

The establishment of the University of Latvia and the subsequent publication of its scientific journal, *Latvijas Universitātes raksti (Acta Universitatis Latviensis)* also promoted the development of social ideas. If prior to this age the development of social ideas was largely the provenance of journalists, authors, poets, and politicians, now the leaders of the university gradually undertook to develop and popularize the social sciences. Empirical research was still rare, but speculative sociology nevertheless took on a more systematic form.

During this period, several works devoted to the analysis of Latvia's economic development were published in Latvia. Several articles were devoted to the analyses of the social aspects of Latvia's demographic situation. In this context, the Institute for Research on the Living Force of the Nation not only analyzed Latvian demographic processes, but also researched the anthropological specifics of Latvians and the various issues of the Latvian heritage.

Latvian thinkers in this era also devoted a great deal of attention to national issues. Most nationalist publications, however, were written in the second half of the 1930s. The ideologues of Latvian nationalism opposed political liberalism and parliamentarianism, and they held collective rights to be higher than individual rights. The ideology of Latvian nationalists was not, however, typified by intolerance toward other nationalities. Rather, Latvian nationalism was characterized by a dislike of Marxism, whose propaganda championed other ideas about solidarity. Like other nationalists, the ideologues of Latvian nationalism worshipped at the altar of rural patriarchies and rural lifestyles, criticizing everything that had to do with industry.

Of separate interest are discussions about the respective defenders of democracy and authoritarianism. The crisis of democracy was primarily associated with the existence of numerous, small democratic parties in Latvia and the destructive activities of their leaders. Many more authors, however, adhered to the cult of leadership and denigrated parliamentarianism.

Also active at this time were the social democrats and persons near to them. On the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, the Marxist Club of Riga published a collection of articles called *Marx and Marxism*.

The Academic Social Sciences Association of the University of Latvia (also known as Aequitas), founded in 1927, was a forerunner of the Institute of Social Sciences, which was supposed to help develop the sciences of economics, sociology, and law. The sociology division of the association never was established, and the Soviet occupation interrupted any plans of establishing a Latvian Academy of Sciences.

Between 1921 and 1929, only one-quarter of the articles on philosophical and social issues that were published by the University of Latvia were in the Latvian language – two-thirds were in German. This brief review indicates that the development of social ideas in Latvia was characterized both by highly varied themes and by vivid personalities. There were sharp discussions, and the professional level of the participants in the process improved over time.

### **The impact of Western theories**

Educational opportunities after the war were usually limited to reading pre-revolutionary texts available in libraries along with foreign works translated into Russian. In the first group were such sociologists as Durkheim, Simmel, Comte, Sorokin, Spencer, Dilthey, and Mills (mostly thinkers who had managed to avoid the attention of Marxist criticism and had therefore not ended up on

censors' lists). In the other group were several books by Western authors, for example, Tomatsu Shibutani; *American Sociology: Perspectives, Problems, Methods* (edited by Parsons and published in 1959); and Carnap's book, *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (1967). Most of these books were stamped "For Scientific Libraries", which meant that they were not accessible at public libraries and could not be sold. In short, they were the privilege of professional scientists.

Latvian sociologists were quick to learn traditional methodological approaches and Western concepts of sociology. The dominant research method was the standardized questionnaire, and there was a lack of other methods. But sociologists began to use internationally recognized programs for data analysis (BMDP, SAS, SPSS).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the number of translated works by Western sociologists increased considerably. Latvian sociologists gained an opportunity to attend global sociological congresses.

### **Oppositional activities**

Strong thematic restrictions were placed on sociology, not only by external, institutional censorship, but also in the form of internalized self-censorship. During Soviet times, most sociologists managed to avoid becoming shills for the regime and its ideology, but only by "emigrating" to ideologically neutral issues (sociologists did not have to be members of the CPSU).

This may seem paradoxical, but during this period, sociology was not dominated by Marxism, but rather by ideas in concert with American positivism. Sociologists published very little in the mass media – the results of their work were published either in scientific journals or, more often, in reports meant for only limited, in-house circulation. The public was interested in sociology, but at the same time distrusted it. Respondents often doubted whether sociologists would really protect their anonymity, and the result was that many people gave incorrect responses. The results of research, therefore, were almost always distorted, the result of respondents' self-censorship, not of any falsification of data by the researchers. Of course, sociologists, being professionals, were well aware of the specifics of the Soviet system and its residents, so they never tried to provoke people into making unreliable statements.

## **2. Redefinition of the discipline since 1990**

### **The change of paradigms**

During the 1990s, as cooperation with the North and West broadened, the research partners of Latvian social scientists also changed. Latvian sociologists were able to study Western sociological theories and to increase the diversity of their theoretical approaches. But at the same time, many sociologists did not notice that they sometimes accepted theories that contradicted each other. While this situation "let a thousand flowers bloom", many of these flowers were poorly rooted. Sometimes it appeared that authors did not make any efforts to critically evaluate the theories they used in their work. That is, they seldom tried to verify these theories with empirical data. Furthermore, researchers rarely used methodological strategies that could confront the theories and challenge their assumptions or conclusions.

### **The change of elites**

Several factors influenced the replacement of the scientific elite. This was facilitated by a nostrification (recertification) of academic degrees that had been conferred both before and after the restoration of statehood. Some scientists did not submit their work for nostrification, and some of those who did were not nostrified. Most scientists who were not nostrified nevertheless

continued to pursue their academic activities as lecturers at universities or as researchers. The meaning of the nostrification procedure was more symbolic than practical. For most Latvian sociologists, Marxism had never been more than window dressing. Pro forma references to the last congress of the Communist Party had to be made, and some quotation from Marx had to be inserted in the introduction of a paper. In the introductions of papers in the 1990s, more references to other authors began to appear, although these quotations, too, often had weak relationships with the content of the papers.

To a large extent, the change of the academic elite was also influenced by a reorganization of funding and research priorities. Under the old system, scientific institutions received their financing directly. Now, the norm is to give grants for specific projects. The principal investigator (PI) of a proposed project submits a request to the Latvian Council of Science, and projects given high ratings in an independent expert review process receive grants from the Council.

A high scientific standard, competitiveness at the international level, and the present efficiency of international contacts serve as the main criteria defining research priorities. A special financing agreement was introduced to facilitate the participation of Latvian scientists in international activities, as well as to give additional support to the best doctoral students in universities and research institutions. Those scholars who were not nostrified are not eligible to be elected to grant review committees or to be eligible for the position of principal investigator (PI).

The integration of formerly independent institutions in universities also influenced the replacement of the elite. A number of researchers who were only partly involved in teaching students prior to the integration began to run departments of sociology at universities in the mid-1990s.

At that time, some scholars who had received their PhDs in Western Europe joined the academic elite as well. In the late 1990s, to facilitate a more rapid replacement of the academic elite, the existing system of two levels of doctoral degrees (Dr. and Dr. with habilitation degree) was replaced with that of a single doctoral degree that enables younger scientists to obtain administrative and academic positions at universities and institutes more quickly. Currently, great emphasis is placed on the preparation of PhD students.

### **New institutional structures**

The main feature of the transformation of the institutional environment of Latvian science was the liquidation of the system of control that the Latvian Academy of Sciences exerted over the scientific institutes. The Institutes became independent from the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Since February 14, 1992, the Latvian Academy of Sciences has functioned as an association of scientists and acts as a non-governmental organization. The main aims and tasks of the LAS are: taking an active part in establishing Latvian science policy and advising the government on scientific issues; promoting the publishing of scientific literature, developing scientific terminology, and maintaining scientific standards; organizing congresses, conferences, discussions, and competitions and popularizing scientific achievements; maintaining international contacts of Latvian scientists; and protecting, maintaining and perfecting research ethics, discussion principles, and traditions. At the same time, the LAS is not authorized to distribute state science budget funds.

The structure of research centers also changed fundamentally, not least because of a lack of resources that led to the liquidation of many facilities at universities, companies, and government agencies. In addition, privately run research centers began to emerge, many of which conduct marketing research in addition to sociological work. Academic research centers, institutes run by universities, and private research centers owned by Western companies all regularly take part in competitions to carry out research projects for state and international organizations. Academic sociologists are oriented more frequently toward analytical research, while private companies tend to do public opinion surveys.

Most of the leading sociologists at Latvian universities have created their own private centers or collaborate with such research centers. Thus, possible conflicts between centers run by universities or private companies have been avoided. Both kinds of centers are also eligible to receive research grants from the Latvian Council of Science.

The Latvian Council of Science funds research projects at six sociological institutions. Among the largest scientific sociological centers in Latvia is the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia, which receives more than half of the Latvian Council of Science grants. Four of the nine doctors of sociology who are active in Latvia at this time are affiliated with the institute. The institute's sociologists can handle the most complex research projects, and they offer high-quality analysis of research results.

Four private companies are currently actively doing public opinion surveys: the Baltic Data House, Latvian Facts, Socially Correlative Data Systems, and the Baltic Studies Center. Specialists from these companies prepare research projects for clients in Latvia and other countries. By and large, these centers have valuable collections of data and good international contacts as well. The quality of the research done by both universities and private companies is pretty much the same. The level at which these resources are used, however, is not always satisfactory.

Baltic Data House is the largest center for market and social research in Baltic States and an affiliate organization of one of the leading research companies in Europe, Taylor Nelson Sofres. BDH serves more than 200 clients and provides information necessary for marketing and management decisions, as well as public administration. In 2001, BDH carried out more than 120 research projects. In 1993, in collaboration with Finnish Gallup Media, BDH founded a company named Baltic Media Facts. In 2000, building on one of BDH's academic and social research department, the Institute of Social Sciences was established. Its major research areas are public policy analysis, analysis and evaluation of public information campaigns, and comparative sociological studies.

The national policy for the development of social sciences is oriented toward integrating the national research potential in higher education by implementing general and sectoral integration plans and agreements. Practically, this means incorporating individual research institutions and their scientific staff in universities.

In September 1990, a new class of sociology students was accepted at the University of Latvia. Unlike the previous era, when sociology students majored in philosophy and specialized in their field only during the last two years of study, current training programs correspond to the curricular structures characteristic of Western European universities. Two other public institutions, the Academy of Culture and the University of Agriculture, also have undergraduate sociology students. All sociology programs must be accredited by a commission of experts that consists of two representatives from universities in Western Europe and one representative of a university from the Baltic States. Successful accreditation allows universities to issue diplomas that are recognized abroad.

Demand for sociologists in Latvia is not that high, and therefore, after graduation, most sociology students find jobs in the state administration or other organizations. But these people typically can use sociological research methods, which are in demand.

### **3. Core theoretical and methodological orientations**

#### **Revival and adaptation of major pre-war traditions**

Most works in the pre-war period were theoretical rather than empirical, but the predominant trend now is quite the opposite (there have been some exceptions – Ozhiganov 1986, Bankovskaja 1991). So there is no continuation of pre-war traditions. Some themes of academic discussions partly overlap (formation of identities, ethnic conflicts, relationships between civic society and the

state), but sociologists seldom utilize the ideas that were dominant in the pre-war period. Nonetheless, a certain continuation in the development of sociology can be discerned in that most contemporary sociologists were students in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Latvia. And even now, considerably closer bonds are being developed among sociologists and philosophers due to their joint work in one institution, which is closer than in other countries.

### **New East-West asymmetries**

The cooperation partners for Latvian social scientists changed in the 1990s. Before the 1990s, there was good cooperation with Baltic and Russian social scientists. Since then, these contacts have narrowed and become irregular. Nonetheless, with more frequent involvement in various research projects and conferences abroad and thanks to the new opportunities to obtain the results of studies done in other countries, Latvian sociologists now have more chances to obtain needed information and insights about social processes in other Central/Eastern European countries than they did under Soviet rule. Except for some isolated cases, however, most joint research projects carried out by sociologists from these countries do not receive Western financial support. The only exceptions have been some joint projects between Latvian and Polish sociologists, e.g. Vladimir Menshikov from the University of Daugavpils cooperated with researchers from Maria Skłodowska-Curie University (Lublin) and Nicholas Copernicus University (Toruń) on the sociology of finances.

Latvian sociologists regularly participate in significant international projects and most have spent time at Western research centers preparing collective monographs with foreign colleagues. The following projects should be mentioned specifically: the International Social Survey Program (ISSP, Latvia has participated in this program since 1995); Paths of a Generation (a longitudinal project involving people who graduated from high school in 1983, countries from the former Soviet Union participate in this project); the World Values Survey and European Values Survey; Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe: Civil Society and Democratic Orientation; Making Agriculture Sustainable: The Role of Farmers Networking and Institutional Strategies (a European joint research project funded by European Commission DG XII/SEER, Socio-Economic and Environmental Research Program); and the UNESCO project, the Management of Social Transformation (MOST). Latvian researchers have also participated in the Central and Eastern European Barometer (CEEBS) program, as well as other major research projects.

International research contacts have been established largely on the basis of Latvian sociologists' participation in international conferences and seminars. Each year, Latvian sociologists present papers at between 20 and 30 such events. Several Latvian sociologists have lectured at foreign universities. At the same time, many Western sociologists take part in projects directed by Latvian sociologists.

A number of full text databases, as well as sociological journals and monographs, are available to students, though limited due to financial constraints. In their studies, students mostly use works published in English, not in Latvian. Until very recently, none of the Western sociology textbooks had been translated into Latvian. Some local textbooks are available to students, but they serve only as an introduction to basic concepts and terms in sociology. With the financial support of the Soros Foundation – Latvia, some works have been translated into Latvian, i.e., Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Erving Goffman, Anthony D. Smith, etc.

### **Quantitative vs. qualitative approaches**

Generally speaking, there has been a good balance between the use of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, but there has not been as good a balance between applied and theoretic research (Bankovskaja, 1991). This may have a negative effect on the quality of research in the near term.

A broad range of methods is used in qualitative research projects, including autobiography, the analysis of life stories, and public and private documents (Tisenkopfs, 1993; Zirnīte, 2001). In-



depth interviews and focus group discussions are carried out in the course of research. Latvian sociologists seldom use observation in gathering empirical data.

Basically, questionnaires approbated in other countries are used in quantitative research, so that the data obtained in Latvia can be compared with the data obtained by social scientists in other countries. This eases the interpretation of the data and the elaboration of the resulting conclusions. SPSS for Windows is the software program most used in data processing.

#### **4. Thematic orientation and funding**

##### **Choice of themes**

The national policy for the development of social sciences is to orient the Latvian social scientists' potential toward national priorities and to stimulate researchers' more active involvement in solving current economic, cultural, and social problems.

In Latvia, socio-economic research projects are funded by a number of international organizations (the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank), various ministries and their affiliated organizations, and the Latvian Council of Science. Sociological research projects financed by the Latvian Council of Science tend to focus on issues related to the transformation of Latvian society in the post-Communist era. This includes research on social structure and the dynamics of social change (Tabuns, 1998c), the background of new economic, socio-political relations and social stratification (Dobelniece, 1997; Trapenciene et al., 2000), the emergence of new social groups, ethnic processes, and national relationships (Dribins, 1994; Karklins and Zepa, 1996; Tabuna, 1997; Vebers, 1996; 2000; Ezera, 1999; Tabuns, 2001), attitudes toward national, regional, and European integration (Broks, Tabuns, and Tabuna, 2001; Tabuns and Tisenkopfs, 2001), the mobility of young people and their integration with social structures (Tisenkopfs, 1995a; 1995b; Koroleva, 1995; 1997a; 1999; 2001), and the employment and life quality of women (Tabuns and Vanaga, 1999; Broks, 1999; Koroleva, 1997; Zarina, 1995).

Research on the society's institutional reforms is being done in connection with the establishment of a democratic system of politics (Broks et. al., 1997; Lakis, 1997; Tabuns, 1998) and citizens' involvement in the political process (Tabuns and Tabuna 1999; 2000; Zepa 1997; 1999a; 1999b; Karklins and Zepa, 2002; Vebers, 1998). Research is also being done on the international integration of Latvian science, as well as on qualitative and quantitative changes that have been occurring in science as a social institution (Tabuns, 1997; 1998b; Trapenciene, Ashmane, and Krutskih, 1994). Research on social policy seeks to analyze balanced agricultural policies (Tisenkopfs, 1998b; 1999a; 1999b) and public policy (Tisenkopfs, 2001b; Eglite, 1995; Menshikov, 2001).

Several grants have also been awarded to conduct research on the agents of social change. Research is being done on the establishment of new social identities (Tisenkopfs, 1995a; 2001; Zepa, 1997; 1998; Tabuns, 2000), the hereditary nature of traditions (Broks, Tabuns, and Tabuna 2001), the role of historical memory (Skultans, 1997; Tisenkopfs, 1993; Zirmite, 2001; Broks et al., 2001a), and present-day strategies of action (Tisenkopfs, 1995a; 1997).

Limited amounts of research are being done on ethno-sociology; the sociology of youth and education; social structure and social change; the sociology of rural and regional development; the sociology of politics; deviant behavior and criminology; gender and family sociology; the sociology of science; social anthropology; the sociology of mass communications, social policy and social work; and the sociology of the environment and of cities. Lack of money hinders work on sociological theory and history; the methodology of sociological research work; industrial and economic sociology; the sociology of lifestyles and culture; the sociology of organizations and social administration; and the sociology of religion.

From 1998 to 2001, one of Latvia's leading sociologists, Talis Tisenkopfs, was the chief editor of the *Latvia. Human Development Report* (2001b; 1999c; 1998a). Many Latvian sociologists were involved in this project. Thanks to this collaboration, it was possible to include a broad spectrum of themes in the series of reports: public policy processes, globalization, and the role of the individual, the state, and the private sector in human development.

On a regular basis since the beginning of 1991, private research centers have carried out public opinion surveys in which respondents are asked to evaluate social and economic aspects of the development of the Latvian state, privatization, and macroeconomic policies (Baltic Data House, [www.bdh.lv](http://www.bdh.lv)). Through collaboration with the International Social Survey Programme and funded by the Latvian Council of Sciences, eight research projects have been carried out in Latvia on topics including national identity, the role of government, the family and changing gender roles, religion, inequality, the environment, and social relations and support. These studies have allowed researchers to do comparative analyses of the processes in Latvia (Zepa, 1999a; 1999b; Tabuns, 2001).

Scholars have been very interested in analyses of identity formation in the Latvian population for one important reason: Latvia is the most ethnically divided country in Eastern Europe. A number of surveys demonstrate that there are marked differences in the ways various sectors within the Latvian population develop identification with an ethnic group, the state, and the political regime. Work on these issues has been based on data from several different studies carried out between 1991 and 2001. Some of the studies overlapped with those carried out in political science, others with the sociology of culture.

These studies have focused on several facets of the problem. Some have focused on the formation of new national, state, and regime identity in Latvia, as well as the links between political and ethnic pluralism. This has included analysis of the role of ethnicity in political mobilization during transition to democracy and the various manifestations of ethnicity in self-consciousness, attitudes, behavior, ideology, and politics (Tabuns, 2001; Vebers, 1996; Zepa, 1997).

There has also been comparative research on national identity characteristics in Latvia and other European countries. This research has attempted to assess the most important similarities and differences in identities on the social and demographic group and national levels (Tabuns, 2001; Zepa, 1998). Researchers have also investigated the Latvian population's attitudes toward regional and European integration and analyzed the factors that influence links between Latvia and other European countries (Tabuns 2001; Tisenkopfs 2001a).

Studies of nationalism and ethnicity have been carried out on four different levels of investigation: first, the individual and biographical level of identity formation, change, transition, and reconstruction throughout the life course; second, the analysis of how identities find expression in concrete social situations and contexts; third, the study of identity as a set of codes, meanings, and stereotypes; fourth, the analysis of links between dominant institutional frames and widespread identity forms in Latvia and the exploration of what kinds of collective experience are likely to have impact on judgments of identity.

Latvian sociologists have also investigated the formation of children's ethnicity, respondents' opinions about typical traits of Latvians and non-Latvians and their ethnic stereotypes, the typical structure of inter-ethnic networks, the causes and consequences of various patterns of inter-ethnic networks, respondents' attitude to inter-ethnic relations in Latvia, non-citizens' attitude toward citizenship, links between the development of the market economy in Latvia and identity formation, individuals' participation in the social and political processes of society, the problem of alienation, how the pressure of local and global factors influences the formation of national identity and changes "system-self" relations, and problems that impede the integration of society (Tabuns, and Tisenkopfs, 2001; Tabuns and Tabuna, 1999).

Most researchers argue that identities are constantly challenged, negotiated, reconstructed, and maintained. They think that identities are not a relatively fixed set of traits of an individual, but that there is not merely a single, "real" national identity of the Latvian people.

### **The impact of thematic orientations on institutional structures**

For the most part, Latvian sociologists are involved in carrying out short-term projects, so they are frequently compelled to shift their research themes and expertise. This “re-tooling” of sociologists is further fueled by the fact that the state or its affiliated institutions occasionally commissions research projects in fields in which Latvian sociologists have no prior experience. Sociologists affiliated with various institutions and universities frequently join projects with ever-changing research tasks. And many sociologists occasionally take simultaneous part in several projects whose research objectives are unrelated. As a result, the institutional structure of Latvian sociology has become amorphous. On the one hand, the low level of specialization may occasionally have a negative impact on the quality of research. On the other hand, in many instances the breadth of sociologists trained in such a manner offers a broader and deeper perspective on social reality than their colleagues who specialize in a narrow theme.

### **Private vs. public funding**

The system of financing scientific research also changed in Latvia. In the old system, scientific institutions received financing; but these days, grants for specific projects are much more the norm. The principal investigator (PI) of a proposed project submits a request to the Latvian Council of Science, and grants from the Council go to projects that are given high ratings in an independent expert review process.

But for the most part, the grants financed by the LCS cover only researcher salaries and rent, because the LCS' resources are not sufficient to cover the other expenses of a research project. Basically, this means that a researcher himself must seek necessary funding. In most instances, researchers get these resources from funds and scientific programs in other countries (Soros Foundation, the 5th Framework Programme of the EU, etc.) or by taking part in applied research projects financed by state government or institutions affiliated to it. At the moment, Latvian sociologists do not receive funds for social analyses from private sources.

## **5. Public space and academic debates**

### **Debated themes, problems, methods**

Latvian sociologists conduct academic debates very rarely, primarily because most of them are overburdened with their own projects. The largest public debate was devoted to the identity problem, but only a few sociologists participated in it. Public attention has also been drawn by regular conferences organized by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology on democracy and ethno-politics (Vebers, 1998, 2000). Latvian sociologists have also organized a series of theoretical seminars. Unfortunately, the Latvian Sociological Association (Latvijas sociologu asociacija, LSA) did not become a center of cooperation among sociologists. At the moment, the LSA plans to pay more attention to improving the quality of sociological research and cooperation among sociologists, as well as between sociologists and society.

Unfortunately, cooperation between sociologists and national government agencies and organizations is far from ideal in Latvia. Nor have sociologists managed to develop good relationships with local government. Nonetheless, sociologists were involved in the preparation of several important documents, including the National Development Plan, the state program Social Integration in Latvia, and the Latvian Poverty Reduction Strategy. And the mass media have had a very friendly attitude toward sociologists, who have been afforded much opportunity to comment on the social and political situation. Sociologists frequently publish their articles in the leading newspapers and journals. As a result, public trust in sociology has increased during the last several years.

### Principal academic journals

Approximately 30 scientific articles are printed each year in Latvian publications. Articles by Latvian sociologists also have received regular exposure in Latvian sociological and humanities magazines, such as *Latvijas ZA Vestis* (Proceedings of the Latvian Academy of Science, Part A) and *Humanities and Social Sciences: Latvia*. Research reports from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology and from the Baltic Data House have also aroused the scientific public's interest. The limited number of potential authors and readers discourages the publication of an academic sociological journal.

The Latvian Council of Science also provides support for the publication of scientific books (sociologists wrote several books in the mid-1990s) and the development of on-line sociology courses.

### Selection of publications in world languages

During the 1990s, Latvian sociologists published several articles in international journals, while countless articles were printed in social science books that were published in other countries in English, Russian, Polish, Finnish, German, and Swedish. English was the predominant language of international publication.

### New manuals, databases

In October 1996, the Latvian Social Science Data Archive (LSZDA, [www.lszda.lv](http://www.lszda.lv)) was funded. The Archive's objectives are cultural and historical (the acquisition and long-term preservation of standardized and highly-processed social science data describing Latvia or social investigators who study Latvia), social (the facilitation of the development of Latvian social science, the provision of open and equitable access to the results of researches, and the dissemination of data and documentation), scientific (making data easily accessible for secondary analyses, increasing the quality of researches and the credibility of research results), educational (providing an informational base for teaching activities in social sciences), and financial (promoting the better utilization of finance resources allotted to the investigation).

At the same time, the Archive provides Latvia's scientists and other interested persons access to data archives in foreign countries and helps foreign archives, investigators, and other interested persons obtain information about Latvia and our social sciences. The LSZDA's strategic planning took account of future increases in the volume of data and of changes in information technologies, which can influence work with data sets. The LSZDA's current task is to improve its services, to broaden its selection of services by offering users new types of data sets (compiled in Latvia and other regions), and to improve the information in the existing data sets.

## 6. Views on further development

### Conclusion

In my opinion, the development of sociology in Latvia during the 1990s was influenced more by exogenous factors, including non-academic ones, than by factors endogenous to the discipline itself. The funding policy of the Latvian government limited scholars' opportunities to carry out their own research projects. In addition, inadequate stipends for postgraduate students and wages for lecturers made university graduates lose interest in pursuing postgraduate studies. The discontinuation of the Latvian Sociological Association's work is a serious drawback.

Sociology's development was also considerably influenced by Latvian sociologists' greater involvement in international projects. Social demand for empirical studies and the subject matter of these studies was largely determined, not by national institutions, but by international

organizations. Scholars who were unable to join international projects had limited opportunities to find funding to pursue their own research. Not only their own colleagues, but also the mass media and scholars from different countries could evaluate the qualifications of Latvian sociologists. Only by winning their recognition and trust have Latvian sociologists been able to claim their place among the academic elite.

### Further development

The main steps that need to be taken to improve the quality of research are:

- scientific and educational institutions need to be integrated, and high-quality teaching resources must be developed;
- standardized requirements must be developed for survey samples and their selection; a unified system of coding demographic parameters must be developed; and standards of describing research projects must be elaborated;
- unified terminology must be developed;
- a code of ethics must be adopted to govern sociological and market research, and a system must be developed to supervise observance of this code;
- public and academic debates must be facilitated that ensure the circulation of sociological (and social) knowledge both in academic milieu and in society as a whole; and
- a system of independent expert analysis must be established.

The development of students' scientific abilities must be facilitated, and students must be involved in actual research projects. Student participation in conferences and seminars in Latvia must be supported, and steps must be taken to make it easier for students to participate in events for young scientists. The bulk of the effort, however, must be devoted to creating conditions that allow students to prepare better bachelor's and master's theses.

At the same time, work must be done to develop better teaching materials – both textbooks and ancillary literature, as well as electronic teaching software that would let students do work with actual bodies of data. Specialists have developed a list of the foreign books whose translation is most urgent if students are to learn about the best examples of sociological thinking.

The development of the social sciences at this point is greatly hampered by terminology problems. To resolve this problem, a dictionary of sociology is being prepared. A smaller explanatory dictionary, meant for schoolchildren, has already been prepared (Zepa and Zobena, 1996).

Data standardization and harmonization is a very crucial issue in Europe right now, and Latvia must deal with these questions, or opportunities for data comparison will disappear very quickly.

Proposals have been developed for a code of ethics for Latvian sociologists. Efforts must be undertaken to ascertain that all organizations conducting sociological or market research in Latvia give official recognition to the code. This would not only improve relations between data users and donors, it would also help achieve better links among the organizations engaged in this kind of research. A generally recognized code of ethics would serve as a control for those persons whose research quality is not up to snuff. The acceptance of data in the social sciences archive will become an important indicator of the quality of an organization's data and of the organization's willingness to submit to external control.

There is an urgent need to establish a neutral institution of expertise to provide expert analysis of data quality for any and all data users.

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